

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 005295

SIPDIS

WHITE HOUSE FOR TUCKER ASKEW

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/16/2012

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [IZ](#) [JO](#) [UNSC](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT'S IRAQ SPEECH: JORDANIANS WELCOME MOVE TO UNSC, FEAR WAR IS COMING, AND ASK "WHAT ABOUT ISRAEL?"

Classified By: DCM GREGORY L. BERRY FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) and (D)

SUMMARY

1. (C) Initial reaction in Jordan to the President's UNGA speech has been mixed. The government issued a generally supportive statement on September 12 calling for the return of inspectors to Iraq, and many of our GOJ interlocutors have privately praised the forcefulness of the speech. Those Jordanians who view the speech in positive terms point to the U.S.'s renewed commitment to multilateral diplomacy as its most important component. However, local media and numerous contacts outside the government have been decidedly negative. Those critical of the speech say the President did not convince them that a preemptive strike was necessary. General public opinion and press commentary pointed to a perceived "double standard" in U.S. foreign policy between enforcement of UNSCRs on Iraq but not on Israel. Whether critic or admirer, however, the Jordanian public is increasingly convinced that a U.S.-Iraq war is coming. End Summary.

PRAISING THE ART OF THE SPEECH, IF NOT ITS CONTENT

2. (C) On 9/12, Minister of State for Political Affairs and Minister of Information Mohammed Adwan issued the only official GOJ response thus far to the President's UNGA speech. After welcoming the President's reference to establishing a Palestinian State in three years, Adwan said "We also hope that President Bush's speech will lead to an immediate dialogue between Iraq and the United Nations for the implementation of all UN resolutions" including the "immediate return of UN arms inspectors to determine whether Iraq has weapons of mass destruction."

3. (C) In a 9/14 discussion with A/PolCouns, Ashraf Zeitoon of FonMin Muasher's Private Office gave a positive assessment of the speech. Zeitoon said that by focusing the discussion back on the Security Council, the President made it "much harder for the U.S.'s international critics to say anything." Zeitoon qualified his praise, however, noting that he and other MFA colleagues feel that while the President had won points among Jordanians for his renewed multilateralism, he had not provided convincing evidence that a preemptive strike was warranted. Ali al-Ayed, also of the FonMin's Private Office, told A/DCM on 9/15 that he understood Mubarak soon would be making a tour of the region to drum up Arab support for the return of inspectors. The President's speech, al-Ayed noted, had made Iraq the issue of the moment in the GOJ, pushing aside, at least for now, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

SOME POSITIVE REACTIONS

4. (C) Samplings of other Embassy contacts also show that the speech resonated in some quarters. Former Iraqi Oil Minister Issam Chalabi said he was "extremely impressed." The speech was "well-balanced, turned the issue around, and covered points that were long overdue." Chalabi was particularly full of praise for the President's emphasis on the plight of the Iraqi people under Saddam: "This was very important. So many democratic governments have forgotten this, as have people in the Arab world. They should be ashamed of themselves." Jamal Tahat, a telecommunications researcher, observed that the speech "made it easier to defend the American position. If there is going to be a war, it will be a more rational war." Several other business contacts also offered a general positive reaction, noting that "anything that reduces uncertainty is welcome."

MEDIA NEGATIVE: U.S. WANTS WAR, WHAT ABOUT ISRAEL?

5. (SBU) Those positive statements among Embassy contacts notwithstanding, Jordanian media and opinionmakers almost unanimously discussed the speech in negative terms. Even the

government-affiliated English language Jordan Times (which is generally very measured in its criticism of the U.S.) stated in an editorial on 9/13 that the President "failed yet again to show solid evidence that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction. His argument that Iraq is a threat to the world remains unconvincing." The paper went on to argue that it was the U.S. -- not Iraq -- that posed a threat to regional stability: "Baghdad says it does not want a war. It will have to demonstrate that. That Bush wants a war, it has long been clear. It is not too late to deny him the chance to get it."

16. (U) Arab language daily "Al-Arab Al-Yawm," in a 9/13 editorial was particularly critical of the perceived U.S. "double standard" in the region: "We, the Arabs who live in an area that the U.S. Administration is seeking to turn into a zone of war and destruction, cannot but feel bitterness for the double standard policy that was clearly evident in Bush's speech. He totally ignored what the Palestinian people have been enduring for the past four months at the hands of the Israeli troops, while showering the world with the 'violations' of the Iraqi regime."

17. (C) Other conversations with Embassy contacts over the past several days have keyed in on the "double standard" issue. Urayb Rantawi, Director of the Al-Quds Center for Research characterized the President's statements on Palestine as "the clearest U.S. statement thus far" in support of Palestinian aspirations. He qualified that praise, however, by adding that "what's going on on the ground, however, undermines its credibility." Former Jordanian Ambassador to Iraq Faleh al-Tawil told us "attacking Iraq because of WMD is unconvincing, especially when you don't do anything about Israel and its WMD." Several other Embassy contacts asked rhetorically why the U.S. is focused on Iraq while Israel, they feel, is guilty of the same offenses: flaunting UNSCRs, possessing WMD, and occupying others' territory.

IN ANY CASE, WAR (EVERYONE NOW BELIEVES) IS COMING

18. (C) What has solidified in the thinking of most Jordanians -- both among critics and admirers of the President's speech -- is a growing sense that war between the U.S. and Iraq is coming. For those who praised the speech, the direction ahead lends itself to a straightforward interpretation. Former Iraqi Oil Minister Chalabi summed it up succinctly saying: "The U.S. appears truly sincere in wanting to topple Saddam this time. I hope that means we are nearing the end of this tragedy." For the critics, the U.S. challenge (or to some "threat") to the UN to "shoulder its responsibilities" is only a superficial repackaging of U.S. war plans. Journalist Musa Keilani in a 9/15 opinion piece stated: "On the surface, it looks great . . . but it is an easy task to reject Iraqi compliance as falling short. The new U.S. move is deceptive and another stepping stone to military action against Iraq."

COMMENT

19. (S) Many of the Jordanians who praised the President's speech welcomed the U.S. pledge to work with the UN in the hope that it will give Iraq one last chance to permit inspectors into the country and avoid military action, which they fear would have serious consequences for Jordan. In contrast, the negative street and media reaction focused on the perceived U.S. double standard in dealing with Arabs versus Israel, a strong undercurrent in the popular Jordanian view of regional issues across the board.
GNEHM